“Historical Contributions” is a new section of Banisteria devoted to reprinting short narratives of relevance to the natural history of Virginia. For this first installment, I have selected a few observations made by John Banister (1650-1692), the first university-trained naturalist to work in Virginia. More details about his life, writings, illustrations, and collections can be found in the publications by Ewan & Ewan (1970, 1992).

The following excerpts are from a paper that was originally published more than three centuries ago (1700-1701. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 22: 807-814). The insects described by Banister (in 1680) include mud dauber wasps, carpenter bees, cockroaches and wood roaches, bed bugs, fireflies (lightning bugs), and glow worms (firefly larvae). Comments in italics are those of James Petiver (1663-1718). Some of the following text was published in slightly different format in Ewan & Ewan (1970), occasionally containing additional words or sentences lacking from the journal version prepared by Petiver.

Literature Cited


Steve Roble, Editor, Banisteria

IV. Some Observations concerning Insects made by Mr John Banister in Virginia, A.D. 1680. with Remarks on them by Mr James Petiver, Apothecary and Fellow of the Royal Society.

**Epsa Labroneum.** Here are divers kinds, long and flender waffted all, these make their Nests of dirt, and are therefore called *Dirt Wafps*. Some of them make their Nests contiguous to one another, each adjoining Cavity having in it 2 or more partitions. Others build them in clamps one upon another; they fix them against a Wall or Ceiling of an house, or any where where dry. There is not above 2 Wafps belonging to one of these Popvery’s, for when they have made one Cell, and put into it 6 or 8 live Spiders, they clofe it up to work upon another, leaving them to brood upon their young, something like that of *Arisaste* in his *Hift. Animal.* Lib. 1, cap. 20.

The young ones of thee are caled over with a thin transparent horny skin of an Amber colour; those of the other are contained in a brown cafe, with a certain number of regular protuberances at one end thereof, some again lye in brown ones that are fowmyn, and some (if I mistake not) naked. I have not had leasure this year to inquire as far into their generation, prodalation, &c. as I would, vid. Mart. *Hist. Animal.* cap. 5, lib. de *Arens* in genre.

*Bombylus Torcal. These Bees eat into Timber, and there make their Nests*. This was in the *Joyce of a House* so firm and found, that it was very hard entering with a Ferret, the holle was but fell big enough for the Bee, to creep in at, and went right up, about 2 inches in the Wood, and then in a tranfverfe line at leaft half a foor on each fide, which feem’d to me (as I probed it with a knitting Needle) to be twice as wide as the entrance, how many Bees belonged to it I cannot tell. There was in, and I heard one or two about the door.

Blatta. *These Cockroaches are one of the Plagues of this Country. They are Oxiparsome and large, that had I not seen one half extruded, I should not have believed them theirs.*

Blatta Volans. *These are very rare, I have seen but this one here.*

Cimicis. *Wall-lites. These are another of our Plagues, for where there is not good care taken to destroy them, they are as numerous in our Beds, as the former are in our Kitchens.*

*Cicindela mas. The Fire-fly.*

*Cicindela Mariana vaginis scatris fucis marginibus salviis Act. Phil. 246. p 397. 16.*

**This is not that great Virginia kind, whose head flinthes, nor it is that smaller one, which *Pip* says the Brazilians call Memos, nor the common kind, tho much of that shape and size. This emits its light at 2 Crescent, but the whole tail of our flinthes, which it contracts and dilates at its pleasure. Its fheth wings are of a dark purple edged with yellow, and so is its head or helment. This is exactly described, and the same with those of Carolina and Maryland from both which places I have received several of them. Yet amongst those from Carolina, which my ingenious Friend Mr Edmund Behain sent me, I find a variety, whose flinthes were wholly blackish, but the Helment edged with yellow. This I call Cicindela Carolina vaginis omnino nigricanibus.*

Cicindela Famina. *The Glow-worm.* Is armed *Back and Head in Joinit Armour of a deep Murray colour fatted to the Thorax; The Tail made of 9 fleshy rings, in the felt of which are visible the 2 shinning points. Its Head is black, so small one cannot without the help of a Glass, perfectly discern the contexture of it. Its Eyes (if it have any) like thofe of a Snail, stand on the tops of 2 horns. It has 8 legs.